



**Frederick County
Government
Frederick, Maryland**

News Release

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COUNTY COMMISSIONERS ADOPT INVOCATION POLICY

FREDERICK, MD – The Frederick Board of County Commissioners today approved an invocation policy to allow prayer at certain of its meetings, consistent with the Chesterfield County, Va., invocation policy upheld by the United States Court of Appeals for the 4th Circuit.

Board President Blaine Young commented, “We recognize that during difficult times in our county, our board would benefit from a prayer for Divine guidance before county commissioners’ public meetings. The board initiated this prayer policy in recognition that The City of Frederick and Maryland State Assembly allow prayers before public sessions. Upon recommendation by our County Attorney’s Office, the board approved a policy that is similar to others that have stood the test in the court system.

“We do not believe there would be any disagreement from the majority of Americans that we are still ‘one nation under God,’ as we say in our pledge of allegiance, and that it says on our dollar bill, ‘In God We Trust.’ Our policy does not mandate a one-county religion or endorse any religion over another, but we do acknowledge our Creator.”

The policy states that the United States Supreme Court has determined that legislative prayer is permissible and may be conducted consistent with the First Amendment to the United States Constitution and its prohibition against laws “respecting an establishment of religion,” *Marsh v. Chambers* (1983). The court noted the “unique history” of legislative prayer and that the “opening of legislative or other deliberative public bodies with prayer is deeply embedded in the history and tradition of this country.”

Further, the policy states that the prayer opportunity may not be used “to proselytize or advance any one, or to disparage any other, faith or belief.”

(more)

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The county commissioners will allow the opportunity for a nonsectarian invocation at public meetings. The county's administrative officer will send correspondence to religious leaders from a database of names to invite them to give an invocation at a board meeting, and then set up a schedule for the religious leaders to present their prayers at meetings.

The policy states that the invocation must refrain from using references specific to any particular religion, denomination or sect, and that the prayer must be directed at the commissioners to "invoke Divine guidance on a public body entrusted with making the laws."

Lastly, the invocation will be limited to no more than three minutes and expresses the board's respect for the diversity of religious denominations and faiths represented and practiced in Frederick County.

For more details, contact County Attorney John Mathias at 301-600-1030 or via e-mail at jmathias@FrederickCountyMD.gov, or Legislative Coordinator Ragen Cherney at 301-600-1049 or via e-mail at rcherney@FrederickCountyMD.gov.

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